

1 October 2003

**Statement of H.E. Mr. Julian Robert Hunte,  
President of the 58th Session of the General Assembly,  
on the International Day of Older Persons**

It is important that we recognise the challenges facing our global community, but more importantly, that we go beyond these challenges to take effective action to address them. The dramatic increase in the number of people worldwide that are living longer is one such challenge, and has put issues concerning older persons squarely on the global agenda.

Today, as we join hands with people around the world in the 13th Annual Celebration of the International Day of Older Persons, we are reminded of the facts compelling our countries and our world to comprehensively address the issues of ageing. Last year, the number of persons aged 60 years or older was estimated to be 629 million representing one in every ten persons. It is estimated that by the year 2050 that figure will rise to one in every five and by 2150, one in every 3 persons will be 60 years of age or older. The World Bank estimates that approximately 70% of older persons now live in developing countries.

It is difficult to imagine how countries may progress if such a significant proportion of the population is not taken into account in the development process. Therefore, I consider the theme for the 13th International Day, "Older People - New Power for Development", to be both essential and timely. I wish especially to commend the NGO Committee on Ageing for taking up this essential approach to issues concerning older persons in its complementary theme, "Mainstreaming Ageing: Forging Links Between the Madrid Plan of Action on Ageing and the Millennium Development Goals.

These themes focus not only on the positive contribution older persons have made, but as well, on the development possibilities they represent. We are mindful, however, of the challenges that the ageing of populations present, particularly to countries in the developing world, many of which are grappling with serious issues such as debt and poverty, and facing the uncertainties of globalisation and trade liberalisation. And even as we celebrate longevity, we are reminded that life expectancy in many parts of the world continues to be impacted by conflict, war and disease. Older persons, who are among the most vulnerable in society, are also among the first to fall victim to these devastating occurrences.

We have the international framework which forms the basis for the integration of older persons into the development process, and to ensure that issues of concern to older persons are comprehensively and continuously addressed. The 1999 Principles for Older Persons identifies: Independence, Participation, Care, Self-Fulfilment and Dignity as central features of our action in respect of older persons. The Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing recognises the

benefits that older persons can make to society, and seeks to mainstream ageing into development frameworks and poverty reduction strategies. The Plan of Action takes the approach that, as in the case of other groups in society, older people should be involved in decisions and action both to promote development and to enjoy its benefits.

Let us now reaffirm our commitment to embrace older persons as a most cherished resource, with an essential contribution to make to social, economic and cultural development. Let us undertake to work with them to tap their wisdom, experience and skills in the building of our communities and societies. And let us recognise their contribution to the wider international community in meeting the objectives set out in the United Nations Charter.

This is also an opportune time to renew our commitments made to older persons, giving special emphasis to their health and well-being, mobilising public support for issues of ageing, building strong partnerships between governments and international organisations as well as civil society and individuals to meet the goals and objectives we have set and providing adequate resources for action-oriented programmes in this area. Above all, let us give high priority to implementing the Madrid Plan of action, as we work towards implementing the United Nations development agenda, particularly the Millennium Development goals.

So on this day dedicated to honouring older persons, I salute my fellow older persons around the world.